THE MIDDLE YEARS

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Henry James
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THE MIDDLE YEARS

BY

HENRY JAMES

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The following pages represent all that Henry James lived to write of a volume of autobiographical reminiscences to which he had given the name of one of his own short stories, The Middle Years. *It was designed to follow on* Notes of a Son and Brother *and to extend to about the same length. The chapters here printed were dictated during the autumn of 1914. They were laid aside for other work toward the end of the year and were not revised by the author. A few quite evident slips have been corrected and the marking of the paragraphs—which he usually deferred till the final revision—has been completed.*

In dictating The Middle Years *he used no notes, and beyond an allusion or two in the unfinished volume itself there is no indication of the course which the book would have taken or the precise period it was intended to cover.*

PERCY LUBBOCK.

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I

If the author of this meandering record has noted elsewhere[1] that an event occurring early in 1870 was to mark the end of his youth, he is moved here at once to qualify in one or two respects that emphasis. Everything depends in such a view on what one means by one's youth —so shifting a consciousness is this, and so related at the same time to many different matters. We are never old, that is we never cease easily to be young, for *all* life at the same time: youth is an army, the whole battalion of our faculties and our freshnesses, our passions and our illusions, on a considerably reluctant march into the enemy's country, the country of the general lost freshness; and I think it throws out at least as many stragglers behind as skirmishers ahead—stragglers who often

[1] "Notes of a Son and Brother," 1914.

catch up but belatedly with the main body, and even in many a case never catch up at all. Or under another figure it is a book in several volumes, and even at this a mere instalment of the large library of life, with a volume here and there closing, as something in the clap of its covers may assure us, while another remains either completely agape or kept open by a fond finger thrust in between the leaves. A volume, and a most substantial, *had* felt its pages very gravely pressed together before the winter's end that I have spoken of, but a restriction may still bear, and blessedly enough, as I gather from memory, on my sense of the whole year then terminated—a year seen by me now in the light of agitations, explorations, initiations (I scarce know how endearingly enough to name them!) which I should call fairly infantine in their indifference to proportions and aims, had they not still more left with me effects and possessions that even yet lend themselves to estimation.

It was at any rate impossible to have been younger, in spite of whatever inevitable

submissions to the rather violent push forward at certain particular points and on lines corresponding with them, than I found myself, from the first day of March 1869, in the face of an opportunity that affected me then and there as the happiest, the most interesting, the most alluring and beguiling, that could ever have opened before a somewhat disabled young man who was about to complete his twenty-sixth year. Treasures of susceptibility, treasures not only unconscious of the remotest approach to exhaustion, but, given the dazzling possibilities, positively and ideally intact, I now recognise—I in fact long ago recognised—on the part of that intensely "reacting" small organism ; which couldn't have been in higher spirits or made more inward fuss about the matter if it had come into a property measured not by mere impressions and visions, occasions for play of perception and imagination, mind and soul, but by dollars and "shares", lands and houses or flocks and herds. It is to the account of that immense fantastication that I set down a state of mind so out of proportion

to anything it could point to round about save by the vaguest of foolish-looking gestures; and it would perhaps in truth be hard to say whether in the mixture of spirit and sense so determined the fact of innocence or that of intelligence most prevailed. I like to recover this really prodigious flush—as my reader, clearly, must perceive I do; I like fairly to hang about a particular small hour of that momentous March day—which I have glanced at too, I believe, on some other and less separated page than this—for the sake of the extraordinary gage of experience that it seemed on the spot to offer, and that I had but to take straight up: my life, on so complacently near a view as I now treat myself to, having veritably consisted but in the prolongation of that act. I took up the gage, and as I look back the fullest as well as simplest account of the interval till now strikes me as being that I have never, in common honour, let it drop again. And the small hour was just that of my having landed at Liverpool in the gusty, cloudy, overwhelmingly English morning and pursued, with immediate intensities of appreci-

ation, as I may call the muffled accompaniment for fear of almost indecently overnaming it, a course which had seated me at a late breakfast in the coffee-room of the old Adelphi Hotel ("Radley's," as I had to deplore its lately having ceased to be dubbed,) and handed me over without a scruple to my fate. This doom of inordinate exposure to appearances, aspects, images, every protrusive item almost, in the great beheld sum of things, I regard in other words as having settled upon me once for all while I observed for instance that in England the plate of buttered muffin and its cover were sacredly set upon the slop-bowl after hot water had been ingenuously poured into the same, and had seen that circumstance in a perfect cloud of accompaniments. I must have had with my tea and my muffin a boiled egg or two and a dab of marmalade, but it was from a far other store of condiments I most liberally helped myself. I was lucidly aware of so gorging—esoterically, as it were, while I drew out the gustatory process; and I must have said in that lost reference to this scene of my

dedication which I mentioned above that I was again and again in the aftertime to win back the homeliest notes of the impression, the damp and darksome light washed in from the steep, black, bricky street, the crackle of the strong draught of the British "sea-coal" fire, much more confident of its function, I thought, than the fires I had left, the rustle of the thick, stiff, loudly unfolded and refolded "Times", the incomparable truth to type of the waiter, truth to history, to literature, to poetry, to Dickens, to Thackeray, positively to Smollett and to Hogarth, to every connection that could help me to appropriate him and his setting, an arrangement of things hanging together with a romantic rightness that had the force of a revelation.

To what end appropriation became thus eager and romance thus easy one could have asked one's self only if the idea of connectibility as stretching away and away hadn't of a sudden taken on such a wealth of suggestion; it represented at once a chain stretching off to heaven knew where, but far into one's future

at least, one's possibilities of life, and every link and pulse of which it was going accordingly to be indispensable, besides being delightful and wonderful, to recognise. Recognition, I dare say, was what remained, through the adventure of the months to come, the liveliest principle at work ; both as bearing on the already known, on things unforgotten and of a sense intensely cultivated and cherished from my younger time, and on the imagined, the unimagined and the unimaginable, a quantity that divided itself somehow into the double muster of its elements, an endless vista or waiting array, down the middle of which I should inconceivably pass—inconceivably save for being sure of some thrilled arrest, some exchange of assurance and response, at every step. Obviously half the charm, as I can but thinly describe it, of the substantially continuous experience the first passages of which I thus note was in the fact that, immensely moved by it as I was, and having so to deal with it—in the anticipatory way or to the whatevers and wherevers and whenevers within me that should find it in

order—I yet felt it in no degree as strange or obscure, baffling or unrecognising on its own side; everything was so far from impenetrable that my most general notion was the very ecstasy of understanding and that really wherever I looked, and still more wherever I pressed, I sank in and in up to my nose. This in particular was of the perfect felicity, that while the fact of difference all round me was immense the embarrassment of it was nil —as if the getting into relation with the least waste had been prepared from so far back that a sort of divine economy now fairly ruled. It was doubtless a part of the total fatuity, and perhaps its sublimest mark, that I knew what everything meant, not simply then but for weeks and months after, and was to know less only with increase of knowledge. That must indeed have been of the essence of the general effect and the particular felicity—only not grotesque because, for want of occasion, not immediately exhibited: a consciousness not other than that of a person abruptly introduced into a preoccupied and animated circle and yet

so miraculously aware of the matters conversed about as to need no word of explanation before joining in. To say of such a person that he hadn't lost time would, I knew, be feebly to express his advantage; my likeness to him, at any rate, probably fell short of an absurd one through the chapter of accidents, mostly of the happiest in their way too, which, restraining the personal impulse for me, kept appearances and pretensions down. The feast, as it more and more opened out, was all of the objective, as we have learned so comfortably to say; or at least of its convenient opposite only in so far as this undertook to interpret it for myself alone.

To return at all across the years to the gates of the paradise of the first larger initiations is to be ever so tempted to pass them, to push in again and breathe the air of this, that and the other plot of rising ground particularly associated, for memory and gratitude, with the quickening process. The trouble is that with these sacred spots, to later appreciation, the garden of youth is apt inordinately to bristle,

and that one's account of them has to shake them together fairly hard, making a coherent thing of them, to profit by the contribution of each. In speaking of my earliest renewal of the vision of Europe, if I may give so grand a name to a scarce more than merely enlarged and uplifted gape, I have, I confess, truly to jerk myself over the ground, to wrench myself with violence from memories and images, stages and phases and branching arms, that catch and hold me as I pass them by. Such a matter as my recovery of contact with London for a few weeks, the contact broken off some nine years before, lays so many plausible traps for me that discretion half warns me to stand off the ground and walk round it altogether. I stop my ears to the advice, however, under the pleading reminder that just those days began a business for me that was to go ever so much further than I then dreamed and planted a seed that was, by my own measure, singularly to sprout and flourish—the harvest of which, I almost permit myself to believe, has even yet not all been gathered. I foresee moreover how

little I shall be able to resist, throughout these Notes, the force of persuasion expressed in the individual *vivid* image of the past wherever encountered, these images having always such terms of their own, such subtle secrets and insidious arts for keeping us in relation with them, for bribing us by the beauty, the authority, the wonder of their saved intensity. They have saved it, they seem to say to us, from such a welter of death and darkness and ruin that this alone makes a value and a light and a dignity for them, something indeed of an argument that our story, since we attempt to tell one, has lapses and gaps without them. Not to be denied also, over and above this, is the downright pleasure of the illusion yet again created, the *apparent* transfer from the past to the present of the particular combination of things that did at its hour ever so directly operate and that isn't after all then drained of virtue, wholly wasted and lost, for sensation, for participation in the act of life, in the attesting sights, sounds, smells, the illusion, as I say, of the recording senses.

What began, during the springtime of my actual reference, in a couple of dusky ground-floor rooms at number 7 Half-Moon Street, was simply an establishment all in a few days of a personal relation with London that was not of course measurable at the moment—I saw in my bedazzled state of comparative freedom too many other relations ahead, a fairly intoxicated vision of choice and range—but that none the less set going a more intimately inner consciousness, a wheel within the wheels, and led to my departing, the actual, the general incident closed, in possession of a return-ticket "good", as we say, for a longer interval than I could then dream about, and that the first really earnest fumble of after years brought surprisingly to light. I think it must have been the very proportions themselves of the invitation and the interest that kept down, under the immense impression, everything in the nature of calculation and presumption; dark, huge and prodigious the other party to our relation, London's and mine, as I called it, loomed and spread—much too mighty a Goliath for the present in

any conceivable ambition even of a fast-growing David. My earlier apprehension, fed at the season as from a thousand outstretched silver spoons—for these all shone to me with that effect of the handsomest hospitality—piled up the monster to such a height that I could somehow only fear him as much as I admired and that his proportions in fact reached away quite beyond my expectation. He was always the great figure of London, and I was for no small time, as the years followed, to be kept at my awestruck distance for taking him on that sort of trust: I had crept about his ankles, I had glanced adventurously up at his knees, and wasn't the moral for the most part the mere question of whether I should ever be big enough to so much as guess where he stopped?

Odd enough was it, I make out, that I was to feel no wonder of that kind or degree play in the coming time over such other social aspects, such superficially more colourable scenes as I paid, in repetition as frequent as possible, my respects and my compliments to: they might meet me with wreathed smiles and

splendid promises and deep divinations of my own desire, a thousand graces and gages, in fine, that I couldn't pretend to have picked up within the circle, however experimentally widened, of which Half-Moon Street was the centre, and nothing therefore could have exceeded the splendour of these successive and multiplied assurances. What it none the less infinitely beguiles me to recognise to-day is that such exhibitions, for all their greater direct radiance, and still more for all their general implication of a store of meaning and mystery and beauty that they alone, from example to example, from prodigy to prodigy, had to open out, left me comparatively little crushed by the impression of their concerning me further than my own action perhaps could make good. It was as if I had seen that all there was for me of these great things I should sooner or later take ; the amount would be immense, yet, as who should say, all on the same plane and the same connection, the aesthetic, the "artistic", the romantic in the looser sense, or in other words in the air of the passions of the intelligence. What other

passions of a deeper strain, whether personal or racial, and thereby more superstitiously importunate, I must have felt involved in the question of an effective experience of English life I was doubtless then altogether unprepared to say ; it probably came, however, I seem actually to make out, very much to this particular perception, exactly, that any penetration of the London scene would *be* experience after a fashion that an exercise of one's "mere intellectual curiosity" wherever else wouldn't begin to represent, glittering as the rewards to such curiosity amid alien peoples of genius might thoroughly appear. On the other hand it was of course going to be nothing less than a superlative help that one would have but to reach out straight and in the full measure of one's passion for these rewards, to find one's self carried all the way by one's active, one's contemplative concern with them—this delightful affair, fraught with increase of light, of joy and wonder, of possibilities of adventure for the mind, in fine, inevitably exhausting the relation.

II

Let me not here withal appear to pretend to say how far I then foresaw myself likely to proceed, as it were, with the inimitable France and the incomparable Italy ; my real point is altogether in the simple fact that they hovered before me, even in their scrappy foretastes, to a great effect of ease and inspiration, whereas I shouldn't at all have resented the charge of fairly hiding behind the lowly door of Mr. Lazarus Fox—so unmistakeably did it open into complications tremendous. This excellent man, my Half-Moon Street landlord—I surrender, I can't keep away from him—figures to me now as but one of the thousand forms of pressure in the collective assault, but he couldn't have been more carefully chosen for his office had he consciously undertaken to express to me in a concentrated manner most

of the things I was "after". The case was rather indeed perhaps that he himself by his own mere perfection put me up to much of what I should most confidently look for, and that the right lines of observation and enjoyment, of local and social contact, as I may call it, were most of all those that started out from him and came back to him. It was as if nothing I saw could have done without him, as if nothing he was could have done without everything else. The very quarters I occupied under his protection happened, for that matter, to swarm—as I estimated swarming—with intensities of suggestion—aware as I now encourage myself to become that the first note of the numberless reverberations I was to pick up in the aftertime had definitely been struck for me as under the wave of his conducting little wand. He flourished it modestly enough, ancient worthy of an immemorial order that he was—old pensioned servant, of course, of a Cumberland (as I believe) family, a kind, slim, celibate, informing and informed member of which occupied his second floor apartments; a

friend indeed whom I had met on the very first occasion of my sallying forth from Morley's Hotel in Trafalgar Square to dine at a house of sustaining, of inspiring hospitality in the Kensington quarter. Succumbing thus to my tangle of memories, from which I discern no escape, I recognise further that if the endlessly befriending Charles Nortons introduced me to Albert Rutson, and Albert Rutson introduced me to his feudal retainer, so it was in no small degree through the confidence borrowed from the latter's interest in the decent appearance I should make, an interest of a consistency not to have been prefigured by any at all like instance in my past, that I so far maintained my dizzy balance as to be able to ascend to the second floor under the thrill of sundry invitations to breakfast. I dare say it is the invitations to breakfast that hold me at this moment by their spell—so do they breathe to me across the age the note of a London world that we have left far behind; in consequence of which I the more yearningly steal back to it, as on sneaking tiptoe, and shut myself up

there without interference. It is embalmed in disconnections, in differences, that I cultivate a free fancy for pronouncing advantageous to it: sunk already was the shaft by which I should descend into the years, and my inspiration is in touching as many as possible of the points of the other tradition, retracing as many as possible of the features of the old face, eventually to be blurred again even before my own eyes, and with the materials for a portrait thereby accessible but to those who were present up to the time of the change.

I don't pretend to date this change which still allows me to catch my younger observation and submission at play on the far side of it; I make it fall into the right perspective, however, I think, when I place it where I began to shudder before a confidence, not to say an impudence, of diminution in the aspects by which the British capital differed so from those of all the foreign together as to present throughout the straight contradiction to them. That straight contradiction, testifying invaluably at every turn, had been from far back the thing,

romantically speaking, to clutch and keep the clue and the logic of ; thanks to it the whole picture, every element, objects and figures, background and actors, nature and art, hung consummately together, appealing in their own light and under their own law—interesting ever in every case by instituting comparisons, sticking on the contrary to their true instinct and suggesting only contrast. They were the *opposite*, the assured, the absolute, the unashamed, in respect to whatever might be of a generally similar intention elsewhere: this was their dignity, their beauty and their strength—to look back on which is to wonder if one didn't quite consciously tremble, before the exhibition, for any menaced or mitigated symptom in it. I honestly think one did, even in the first flushes of recognition, more or less so tremble ; I remember at least that in spite of such disconcertments, such dismays, as certain of the most thoroughly Victorian *choses vues* originally treated me to, something yet deeper and finer than observation admonished me to like them just as they were, or at least not too

fatuously to dislike—since it somehow glimmered upon me that if they had lacked their oddity, their monstrosity, as it even might be, their unabashed insular conformity, other things that belong to them, as they belong to these, might have loomed less large and massed less thick, which effect was wholly to be deprecated. To catch that secret, I make out the more I think of it, was to have perhaps the smokiest, but none the less the steadiest, light to walk by; the "clue", as I have called it, was to be one's appreciation of an England that should turn its back directly enough, and without fear of doing it too much, on examples and ideas not strictly homebred—since she did her own sort of thing with such authority and was even then to be noted as sometimes trying other people's with a *kind* of disaster not recorded, at the worst, among themselves.

I must of course disavow pretending to have read this vivid philosophy into my most immediate impressions, and I may in fact perhaps not claim to have been really aware of its seed till a considerable time had passed, till

apprehensions and reflections had taken place in quantity, immeasurable quantity, so to speak, and a great stir-up of the imagination been incurred. Undoubtedly is it in part the new —that is, more strictly, the elder—acuteness that I touch all the prime profit with; I didn't know at the time either how much appearances were all the while in the melting-pot or what wealth of reaction on them I was laying up. I cherish, for love of the unbroken interest, all the same, the theory of certain then positive and effective prefigurements, because it leaves me thus free for remarking that I knew where I was, as I may put it, from the moment I saw the state of the London to come brought down with the weight of her abdication of her genius. It not unnaturally may be said that it hasn't been till to-day that we *see* her genius in its fulness—throwing up in a hundred lights, matters we practically acknowledge, such a plastic side as we had never dreamed she possessed. The genius of accommodation is what we had last expected of her—accommodation to anything but her portentous self, for in *that*

connection she was ever remarkable ; and certainly the air of the generalised, the emulous smart modern capital has come to be written upon her larger and larger even while we look.

The unaccommodating and unaccommodated city remains none the less closely consecrated to one's fondest notion of her—the city too indifferent, too proud, too unaware, too stupid even if one will, to enter any lists that involved her moving from her base and that thereby, when one approached her from the alien *positive* places (I don't speak of the American, in those days too negative to be related at all) enjoyed the enormous "pull", for making her impression, of ignoring everything but her own perversities and then of driving these home with an emphasis not to be gainsaid. Since she didn't emulate, as I have termed it, so she practised her own arts altogether, and both these ways and these consequences were in the flattest opposition (*that* was the happy point!) to foreign felicities or foreign standards, so that the effect in every case was of the straightest reversal of them—with black for the foreign

white and white for the foreign black, wet for the foreign dry and dry for the foreign wet, big for the foreign small and small for the foreign big: I needn't extend the catalogue. *Her* idiosyncrasy was never in the least to have been inferred or presumed; it could only, in general, make the outsider provisionally gape. She sat thus imperturbable in her felicities, and if that is how, remounting the stream of time, I like most to think of her, this is because if her interest is still undeniable—as that of overgrown things goes—it has yet lost its fineness of quality. Phenomena may be interesting, thank goodness, without being phenomena of elegant expression or of any other form of restless smartness, and when once type is strong, when once it plays up from deep sources, every show of its sincerity delivers us a message and we hang, to real suspense, on its continuance of energy, on its again and yet again consistently acquitting itself. So it keeps in tune, and, as the French adage says, *c'est le ton qui fait la chanson*. The mid-Victorian London was sincere—that was a vast virtue and a vast

appeal; the contemporary is sceptical, and most so when most plausible; the turn of the tide could verily be fixed to an hour—the hour at which the new plausibility began to exceed the old sincerities by so much as a single sign. They could truly have been arrayed face to face, I think, for an attentive eye—and I risk even saying that my own, bent upon them, as was to come to pass, with a habit of anxiety that I should scarce be able to overstate, had its unrecorded penetrations, its alarms and recoveries, even perhaps its very lapses of faith, though always redeemed afresh by still fonder fanaticisms, to a pitch that shall perhaps present itself, when they expose it all the way, as that of tiresome extravagance. Exposing it all the way is none the less, I see, exactly what I plot against it—or, otherwise expressed, in favour of the fine truth of history, so far as a throb of that awful pulse has been matter of one's own life; in favour too of the mere returns derivable from more inordinate curiosity. These Notes would enjoy small self-respect, I think, if that principle, not to call it that passion, didn't almost furiously ride them.

III

I was at any rate in the midst of sincerities enough, sincerities of emphasis and "composition"; perversities, idiosyncrasies, incalculabilities, delightful all as densities at first insoluble, delightful even indeed as so much mere bewilderment and shock. When was the shock, I ask myself as I look back, not so deadened by the general atmospheric richness as not to melt more or less immediately into some succulence for the mind, something that could feed the historic sense almost to sweetness? I don't mean that it was a shock to be invited to breakfast—there were stronger ones than that; but was in fact the *trait de mœurs* that disconnected me with most rapidity and intensity from all I had left on the other side of the sea. To be so disconnected, for the time, and in the most insidious manner, was above all

what I had come out for, and every appearance that might help it was to be artfully and gratefully cultivated. I recollect well how many of these combined as I sat at quite punctual fried sole and marmalade in the comparatively disengaged sitting-room of the second floor—the occupancy of the first has remained vague to me; disengaged from the mantle of gloom the folds of which draped most heavily the feet of the house, as it were, and thereby promoted in my own bower the chronic dusk favourable to mural decoration consisting mainly of framed and glazed "coloured" excisions from Christmas numbers of the Illustrated London News that had been at their hour quite modern miracles. Was it for that matter into a sudden splendour of the modern that I ascendingly emerged under the hospitality of my kind fellow-tenant, or was it rather into the fine classicism of a bygone age, as literature and the arts had handed down that memory? Such were the questions whisked at every turn under my nose and reducing me by their obscure charm but to bewildered brooding, I

fear, when I should have been myself, to repay these attentions, quite forward and informing and affirmative.

There were eminent gentlemen, as I was sure they could only be, to "meet" and, alas, awfully to interrogate me—for vivid has remained to me, as the best of my bewilderment, the strangeness of finding that I could be of interest to *them*: not indeed to call it rather the proved humiliation of my impotence. My identity for myself was *all* in my sensibility to their own exhibition, with not a scrap left over for a personal show; which made it as inconvenient as it was queer that I should be treated as a specimen and have in the most unexpected manner to prove that I was a good one. I knew myself the very worst conceivable, but how to give to such other persons a decent or coherent reason for my being so required more presence of mind than I could in the least muster—the consequence of which failure had to be for me, I fear, under all that confused first flush, rather an abject acceptance of the air of imbecility. There were, it appeared, things of interest

taking place in America, and I had had, in this absurd manner, to come to England to learn it: I had had over there on the ground itself no conception of any such matter—nothing of the smallest interest, by any perception of mine, as I suppose I should still blush to recall, had taken place in America since the War. How *could* anything, I really wanted to ask—anything comparable, that is, to what was taking place under my eyes in Half-Moon Street and at dear softly presiding Rutson's table of talk. It doubtless essentially belonged to the exactly right type and tone and general figure of my fellow-breakfasters from the Temple, from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the House of Commons, from goodness knew what other scarce discernible Olympian altitudes, it belonged to the very cut of their hair and their waistcoats and their whiskers—for it was still more or less a whiskered age—that they should desire from me much distinctness about General Grant's first cabinet, upon the formation of which the light of the newspaper happened then to beat; yet at the same time that I asked

myself if it was to such cold communities, such flat frustrations as were so proposed, that I had sought to lift my head again in European air, I found the crisis enriched by sundry other apprehensions.

They melted together in it to that increase of savour I have already noted, yet leaving me vividly admonished that the blankness of my mind as to the Washington candidates relegated me to some class unencountered as yet by any one of my conversers, a class only not perfectly ridiculous because perfectly insignificant. Also that politics walked abroad in England, so that one might supremely bump against them, as much as, by my fond impression, they took their exercise in America but through the back streets and the ways otherwise untrodden and the very darkness of night ; that further all lively attestations were *ipso facto* interesting, and that finally and in the supreme degree, the authenticity of whatever one was going to learn in the world would probably always have for its sign that one got it at some personal cost. To this generalisation mightn't

one even add that in proportion as the cost was great, or became fairly excruciating, the lesson, the value acquired would probably be a thing to treasure? I remember really going so far as to wonder if any act of acquisition of the life-loving, life-searching sort that most appealed to me wouldn't mostly be fallacious if unaccompanied by that tag of the price paid in personal discomfort, in some self-exposure and some none too impossible consequent discomfiture, for the sake of it. Didn't I even on occasion mount to the very height of seeing it written that these bad moments were the downright consecration of knowledge, that is of perception and, essentially, of exploration, always dangerous and treacherous, and so might afterwards come to figure to memory, each in its order, as the silver nail on the wall of the temple where the trophy is hung up? All of which remark, I freely grant, is a great ado about the long since so bedimmed little Half-Moon Street breakfasts, and is moreover quite wide of the mark if suggesting that the joys of recognition, those of imaginatively, of projectively fitting in and

fitting out every piece in the puzzle and every recruit to the force of a further understanding weren't in themselves a most bustling and cheering business.

It was bustling at least, assuredly, if not quite always in the same degree exhilarating, to breakfast out at all, as distinguished from lunching, without its being what the Harvard scene made of it, one of the incidents of "boarding"; it was association at a jump with the ghosts of Byron and Sheridan and Scott and Moore and Lockhart and Rogers and *tutti quanti* —as well as the exciting note of a social order in which everyone wasn't hurled straight, with the momentum of rising, upon an office or a store. The mere vision in numbers of persons embodying and in various ways sharply illustrating a clear alternative to that passivity told a tale that would be more and more worth the reading with every turn of the page. So at all events I fantasticated while harassed by my necessity to weave into my general tapestry every thread that would conduce to a pattern, and so the thread for instance of the great little difference

of my literally never having but once "at home" been invited to breakfast on types as well as on toast and its accessories could suggest an effect of silk or silver when absolutely dangled before me. That single occasion at home came back in a light that fairly brought tears to my eyes, for it was touching now to the last wanness that the lady of the winter morn of the Massachusetts Sabbath, one of those, as I recover it, of 1868, to reach whose board we had waded through snowdrifts, had been herself fondling a reminiscence, though I can scarce imagine supposing herself to offer for our consumption any other type than her own. It was for that matter but the sweet staleness of her reminiscence that made her a type, and I remember how it had had to do thereby all the work: *she*, of an age to reach so considerably back, had breakfasted out, in London, and with Mr. Rogers himself—that was the point; which I am bound to say did for the hour and on that spot supply richness of reference enough. And I am caught up, I find, in the very act of this claim for my prior scantness of experience

by a memory that makes it not a little less perfect and which is oddly enough again associated with a struggle, on an empty stomach, through the massed New England whiteness of the prime Sunday hour. I still cherish the vision, which couldn't then have faded from me, of my having, during the age of innocence—I mean of my own—breakfasted with W. D. Howells, insidious disturber and fertiliser of that state in me, to "meet" Bayard Taylor and Arthur Sedgwick all in the Venetian manner, the delightful Venetian manner which toward the later 'sixties draped any motion on our host's part as with a habit still appropriate. *He* had risen that morning under the momentum of his but recently concluded consular term in Venice, where margin, if only that of the great loungeable piazza, had a breadth, and though Sedgwick and I had rather, as it were, to take the jump standing, this was yet under the inspiration of feeling the case most special. Only it had *been* Venetian, snow-shoes and all; I had stored it sacredly away as not American at all, and was of course to learn in Half-

Moon Street how little it had been English either.

What must have seemed to me of a fine international mixture, during those weeks, was my thrilling opportunity to sit one morning, beside Mrs. Charles Norton's tea-urn, in Queen's Gate Terrace, opposite to Frederic Harrison, eminent to me at the moment as one of the subjects of Matthew Arnold's early fine banter, one of his too confidently roaring "young lions" of the periodical press. Has any gilding ray since that happy season rested here and there with the sovereign charm of interest, of drollery, of felicity and infelicity taken on by scattered selected objects in that writer's bright critical dawn?—an element in which we had the sense of sitting gratefully bathed, so that we fairly took out our young minds and dabbled and soaked them in it as we were to do again in no other. The beauty was thus at such a rate that people had references, and that a reference was then, to my mind, whether in a person or an object, the most glittering, the most becoming ornament possible, a style of decoration one

seemed likely to perceive figures here and there, whether animate or not, quite groan under the accumulation and the weight of. One had scarcely met it before—that I now understood; at the same time that there was perhaps a wan joy in one's never having missed it, by all appearance, having on the contrary ever instinctively caught it, on the least glimmer of its presence. Even when present, or what in the other time I had taken for present, it had been of the thinnest, whereas all about me hereafter it would be by all appearance almost glutinously thick—to the point even of one's on occasion sticking fast in it; that is finding intelligibility smothered in quantity. I lost breath in fact, no doubt, again and again, with this latter increase, but was to go on and on for a long time before any first glimmer of reaction against so special a source of interest. It attached itself to objects often, I saw, by no merit or virtue—above all, repeatedly, by no "cleverness"—of their own, but just by the luck of history, by the action of multiplicity of circumstance. Condemned the human particle "over

here" was to *live*, on whatever terms, in thickness—instead of being free, comparatively, or as I at once ruefully and exquisitely found myself, only to feel and to think in it. Ruefully because there were clearly a thousand contacts and sensations, of the strong direct order, that one lost by not so living; exquisitely because of the equal number of immunities and independences, blest independences of perception and judgment, blest liberties of range for the intellectual adventure, that accrued by the same stroke. These at least had the advantage, one of the most distinguished conceivable, that when enjoyed with a certain intensity they might produce the illusion of the other intensity, that of being involved in the composition and the picture itself, in the situations, the complications, the circumstances, admirable and dreadful; while no corresponding illusion, none making for the ideal play of reflection, conclusion, comparison, however one should incline to appraise the luxury, seemed likely to attend the immersed or engaged condition.

Whatever fatuity might at any rate have

resided in these complacencies of view, I made them my own with the best conscience in the world, and I meet them again quite to extravagance of interest wherever on the whole extent of the scene my retrospect sets me down. It wasn't in the least at the same time that encountered celebrities only thus provoked the shifting play of my small lamp, and this too even though they were easily celebrated, by my measure, and though from the very first I owed an individual here and there among them, as was highly proper, the benefit of impression at the highest pitch. On the great supporting and enclosing scene itself, the big generalised picture, painted in layer upon layer and tone upon tone, one's fancy was all the while feeding; objects and items, illustrations and aspects might perpetually overlap or mutually interfere, but never without leaving consistency the more marked and character the more unmistakeable. The place, the places, bristled so for every glance with expressive particulars, that I really conversed with them, at happy moments, more than with the figures that moved in them, which

affected me so often as but submissive articles of furniture, "put in" by an artist duly careful of effect and yet duly respectful of proportion. The great impression was doubtless no other then and there than what it is under every sky and before every scene that remind one afresh, at the given moment, of all the ways in which producing causes and produced creatures correspond and interdepend; but I think I must have believed at that time that these cross references kept up their game in the English air with a frankness and a good faith that kept the process, in all probability, the most traceable of its kind on the globe.

What was the secret of the force of that suggestion?—which was not, I may say, to be invalidated, to my eyes, by the further observation of cases and conditions. Was it ~~that~~ the enormous "pull" enjoyed at every point of the general surface the stoutness of the underlying belief in what was behind all surfaces?—so that the particular visible, audible, palpable fact, however small and subsidiary, was incomparably absolute, or had, so to speak, such a

conscience and a confidence, such an absence of reserve and latent doubts about itself, as was not elsewhere to be found. Didn't such elements as that represent, in the heart of things, possibilities of scepticism, of mockery, of irony, of the return of the matter, whatever it might be, on itself, by some play or other of the questioning spirit, the spirit therefore weakening to entire comfort of affirmations? Didn't I see that humour itself, which might seem elsewhere corrosive and subversive, was, as an English faculty, turned outward altogether and never turned inward?—by which convenient circumstance subversion, or in other words alteration and variation were not promoted. Such truths were wondrous things to make out in such connections as my experience was then, and for no small time after, to be confined to ; but I positively catch myself listening to them, even with my half-awakened ears, as if they had been all so many sermons of the very stones of London. *There*, to come back to it, was exactly the force with which these stones were to build me capaciously round: I invited them, I besought

them, to say all they would, and—to return to my figure of a while back—it was soon so thoroughly as if they had understood that, once having begun, they were to keep year after year fairly chattering to me. Many of these pages, I fondly foresee, must consist but of the record of their chatter. What was most of all happening, I take it, was that under an absurd special stress I was having, as who should say, to improvise a local medium and to arrange a local consciousness. Against my due appropriation of those originally closest at my hand inevitable accidents had conspired—and, to conclude in respect to all this, if a considerable time was to be wanted, in the event, for ideal certainty of adjustment, half the terms required by this could then put forth the touching plea that they had quite achingly waited.

IV

It may perhaps seem strange that the soil should have been watered by such an incident as Mr. Lazarus Fox's reply, in the earliest rich dusk, to my inquiry as to whither, while I occupied his rooms, I had best betake myself most regularly for my dinner: "Well, there is the Bath Hotel, sir, a very short walk away, where I should think you would be very comfortable indeed. Mr. So-and-So dines at his club, sir—but there is also the Albany in Piccadilly, to which I believe many gentlemen go." I think I measured on the spot "all that it took" to make my friend most advisedly—for it was clearly what he did—see me seated in lone state, for my evening meal, at the heavy mahogany of the stodgy little hotel that in those days and for long after occupied the north-west corner of Arlington Street and to which, in

common with many compatriots, I repeatedly resorted during the years immediately following. We *suffered*, however, on those occasions, the unmitigated coffee-room of Mr. Fox's prescription—it was part of a strange inevitability, a concomitant of necessary shelter and we hadn't at least gone forth to invoke its austere charm. I tried it, in that singular way, at the hour I speak of—and I well remember forecasting the interest of a social and moral order in which it could be supposed of me that, having tried it once, I should sublimely try it again. My success in doing so would indeed have been sublime, but a finer shade of the quality still attached somehow to my landlord's confidence in it ; and this was one of the threads that, as I have called them, I was to tuck away for future picking-up again and unrolling. I fell back on the Albany, which long ago passed away and which I seem to have brushed with a touch of reminiscence in some anticipation of the present indulgence that is itself quite ancient history. It was a small eating-house of the very old English tradition, as I then supposed

at least, just opposite the much greater establishment of the same name, which latter it had borrowed, and I remember wondering whether the tenants of the classic chambers, the beadle-guarded cluster of which was impressive even to the deprecated approach, found their conception of the "restaurant"—we still pronounced it in the French manner—met by the small compartments, narrow as horse-stalls, formed by the high straight backs of hard wooden benches and accommodating respectively two pairs of feeders, who were thus so closely face to face as fairly to threaten with knife and fork each others' more forward features.

The scene was sordid, the arrangements primitive, the detail of the procedure, as it struck me, wellnigh of the rudest; yet I remember rejoicing in it all—as one indeed might perfectly rejoice in the juiciness of joints and the abundance of accessory pudding; for I said to myself under every shock and at the hint of every savour that this was what it was for an exhibition to reek with local colour, and one could dispense with a napkin, with a crusty

roll, with room for one's elbows or one's feet, with an immunity from intermittance of the "plain boiled", much better than one could dispense with that. There were restaurants galore even at that time in New York and in Boston, but I had never before had to do with an eating-house and had not yet seen the little old English world of Dickens, let alone of the ever-haunting Hogarth, of Smollett and of Boswell, drenched with such a flood of light. As one sat there one *understood*; one drew out the severe séance not to stay the assault of precious conspiring truths, not to break the current of in-rushing telltale suggestion. Every face was a documentary scrap, half a dozen broken words to piece with half a dozen others, and so on and on; every sound was strong, whether rich and fine or only queer and coarse; everything in this order drew a positive sweetness from never being—whatever else it was—gracelessly flat. The very rudeness was ripe, the very commonness was conscious—that is not related to mere other forms of the same, but to matters as different as possible, into which

it shaded off and off or up and up ; the image in fine was organic, rounded and complete, as definite as a Dutch picture of low life hung on a museum wall. "Low" I say in respect to the life ; but that was the point for me, that whereas the smartness and newness beyond the sea supposedly disavowed the low, they did so but thinly and vainly, falling markedly short of the high ; which the little boxed and boiled Albany attained to some effect of, after a fashion of its own, just by having its so thoroughly appreciable note-value in a scheme of manners. It was imbedded, so to speak, in the scheme, and it borrowed lights, it borrowed even glooms, from so much neighbouring distinction. The places across the sea, as they to my then eyes faintly after-glowed, had no impinging borders but those of the desert to borrow *from*. And if it be asked of me whether all the while I insist, for demonstration of the complacency with which I desire to revert, on not regretting the disappearance of such too long surviving sordidries as those I have evoked, I can but answer that blind emotion, in whichever sense

directed, has nothing to say to the question and that the sense of what we just *could* confidently live by at a given far-away hour is a simple stout fact of relief.

Relief, again, I say, from the too enormous present accretions and alternatives—which we witlessly thought so innumerable then, which we artlessly found so much of the interest of *in* an immeasurable multiplicity and which I now feel myself thus grope for ghostly touch of in the name, neither more nor less, of poetic justice. I wasn't doubtless at the time so very sure, after all, of the comparative felicity of our state, that of the rare *moment* for the fond fancy —I doubtless even a bit greedily missed certain quantities, not to call them certain qualities, here and there, and the best of my actual purpose is to make amends for that blasphemy. There isn't a thing I can imagine having missed that I don't quite ache to miss again ; and it remains at all events an odd stroke that, having of old most felt the thrill of the place in its mighty muchness, I have lived to adore it backward for its sweet simplicity. I find myself in fact at

the present writing only too sorry when not able to minimise conscientiously this, that or the other of the old sources of impression. The thing is indeed admirably possible in a *general* way, though much of the exhibition was none the less undeniably, was absolutely large: how can I for instance recall the great cab-rank, mainly formed of delightful hansoms, that stretched along Piccadilly from the top of the Green Park unendingly down, without having to take it for unsurpassably modern and majestic? How can I think—I select my examples at hazard—of the "run" of the more successful of Mr. Robertson's comedies at the "dear little old" Prince of Wales's Theatre in Tottenham Court Road as anything less than one of the wonders of our age? How, by the same token, can I not lose myself still more in the glory of a time that was to watch the drawn-out procession of Henry Irving's Shakespearean splendours at the transcendent Lyceum? or how, in the same general line, not recognise that to live through the extravagant youth of the aesthetic era, whether as embodied in the then

apparently inexhaustible vein of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas or as more monotonously expressed in those "last words" of the *raffiné* that were chanted and crooned in the damask-hung temple of the Grosvenor Gallery, was to seem privileged to such immensities as history would find left to her to record but with bated breath?

These latter triumphs of taste, however, though lost in the abysm now, had then a good many years to wait and I alight for illustrative support of my present mild thesis on the comparative humility, say, of the inward aspects, in a large measure, of the old National Gallery, where memory mixes for me together so many elements of the sense of an antique world. The great element was of course that I well-nigh incredibly stood again in the immediate presence of Titian and Rembrandt, of Rubens and Paul Veronese, and that the cup of sensation was thereby filled to overflowing; but I look at it to-day as concomitantly warm and closed-in and, as who should say, cosy that the ancient order and contracted state and thick-coloured dimness, all unconscious of rearrangements and reversals,

blighting new lights and invidious shattering comparisons, still prevailed and kept contemplation comfortably confused and serenely superstitious, when not indeed at its sharpest moments quite fevered with incoherences. The place looks to me across the half century richly dim, yet at the same time both perversely plain and heavily violent—violent through indifference to the separations and selections that have become a tribute to modern nerves; but I cherish exactly those facts of benightedness, seeming as they do to have positively and blessedly conditioned the particular sweetness of wonder with which I haunted the Family of Darius, the Bacchus and Ariadne, or the so-called portrait of Ariosto. Could one in those days feel anything with force, whether for pleasure or for pain, without feeling it as an immense little act or event of life, and as therefore taking place on a scene and in circumstances scarce at all to be separated from its own sense and impact?—so that to recover it is to recover the whole medium, the material pressure of things, and find it most marked for preserva-

tion as an aspect, even, distinguishably, a "composition."

What a composition, for instance again I am capable at this hour of exclaiming, the conditions of felicity in which I became aware, one afternoon during a renewed gape before the Bacchus and Ariadne, first that a little gentleman beside me and talking with the greatest vivacity to another gentleman was extremely remarkable, second that he had the largest and most *chevelu* auburn head I had ever seen perched on a scarce perceptible body, third that I held some scrap of a clue to his identity, which couldn't fail to be eminent, fourth that this tag of association was with nothing less than a small photograph sent me westward across the sea a few months before, and fifth that the sitter for the photograph had been the author of Atalanta in Calydon and Poems and Ballads! I thrilled, it perfectly comes back to me, with the prodigy of this circumstance that I should be admiring Titian in the same breath with Mr. Swinburne —that is in the same breath in which *he* admired Titian and in which I also admired *him*, the

whole constituting on the spot between us, for appreciation, that is for mine, a fact of intercourse, such a fact as could stamp and colour the whole passage ineffaceably, and this even though the more illustrious party to it had within the minute turned off and left me shaken. I was shaken, but I was satisfied—that was the point ; I didn't ask more to interweave another touch in my pattern, and as I once more gather in the impression I am struck with my having deserved truly as many of the like as possible. I was welcome to them, it may well be said, on such easy terms—and yet I ask myself whether, after all, it didn't take on my own part some doing, as we nowadays say, to make them so well worth having. They themselves took, I even at the time felt, little enough trouble for it, and the virtue of the business was repeatedly, no doubt, a good deal more in what I brought than in what I took.

I apply this remark indeed to those extractions of the quintessence that had for their occasion either one's more undirected though never fruitless walks and wanderings or one's earnest,

one's positively pious approach to whatever consecrated ground or shrine of pilgrimage that might be at the moment in order. There was not a regular prescribed "sight" that I during those weeks neglected—I remember haunting the museums in especial, though the South Kensington was then scarce more than embryonic, with a sense of duty and of excitement that I was never again to know combined in equal measure, I think, and that it might really have taken some element of personal danger to account for. There *was* the element, in a manner, to season the cup with sharpness—the danger, all the while, that my freedom might be brief and my experience broken, that I was under the menace of uncertainty and subject in fine to interruption. The fact of having been so long gravely unwell sufficed by itself to keep apprehension alive ; it was our idea, or at least quite intensely mine, that what I was doing, could I but put it through, would be intimately good for me—only the putting it through was the difficulty, and I sometimes faltered by the way. This makes now for a general air on the

part of all the objects of vision that I recover, and almost as much in those of accidental encounter as in the breathlessly invoked, of being looked at for the last time and giving out their message and story as with the still, collected passion of an only chance. This feeling about them, not to say, as I might have imputed it, *in* them, wonderfully helped, as may be believed, the extraction of quintessences—which sprang at me of themselves, for that matter, out of any appearance that confessed to the least value in the compound, the least office in the harmony. If the commonest street-vista was a fairly heart-shaking contributive image, if the incidents of the thick renascent light anywhere, and the perpetual excitement of never knowing, between it and the historic and determined gloom, which was which and which one would most "back" for the general outcome and picture, so the great sought-out compositions, the Hampton Courts and the Windsors, the Richmonds, the Dulwiches, even the very Hampstead Heaths and Putney Commons, to say nothing of the Towers, the Temples, the Cathedrals and the

strange penetrabilities of the City, ranged themselves like the rows of great figures in a sum, an ámount immeasurably huge, that one would draw on if not quite as long as one lived, yet as soon as ever one should seriously get to work. That, to a tune of the most beautiful melancholy—at least as I catch it again now—was the way all values came out: they were charged somehow with a useability the most immediate, the most urgent, and which, I seemed to see, would keep me restless till I should have done something of my very own with them.

This was indeed perhaps what most painted them over with the admonitory appeal: there were truly moments at which they seemed not to answer for it that I should get all the good of them, and the finest—what I was so extravagantly, so fantastically after—unless I could somehow at once indite my sonnet and prove my title. The difficulty was all in there being so much of them—I might myself have been less restless if they could only have been less vivid. This they absolutely declined at any moment and in any connection to be, and it

was ever so long till they abated a jot of the refusal. Thereby, in consequence, as may easily be judged, they were to keep me in alarms to which my measures practically taken, my catastrophes anxiously averted, remained not quite proportionate. I recall a most interesting young man who had been my shipmate on the homeward-bound "China", shortly before—I could go at length into my reasons for having been so struck with him, but I forbear—who, on our talking, to my intense trepidation of curiosity, of where I might advisedly "go" in London, let me know that he always went to Craven Street Strand, where bachelor lodgings were highly convenient, and whence I in fact then saw them flush at me over the cold grey sea with an authenticity almost fierce. I didn't in the event, as has been seen, go to Craven Street for rooms, but I did go, on the very first occasion, for atmosphere, neither more nor less —the young man of the ship, building so much better than he knew, had guaranteed me such a rightness of that; and it belongs to this reminiscence, for the triviality of which I should

apologize did I find myself at my present pitch capable of apologizing for anything, that I had on the very spot there one of those hallucinations as to the precious effect dreadful to lose and yet impossible to render which interfused the aesthetic dream in presence of its subject with the mortal drop of despair (as I should insist at least didn't the despair itself seem to have acted here as the preservative.) The precious effect in the case of Craven Street was that it absolutely reeked, to my fond fancy, with associations born of the particular ancient piety embodied in one's private altar to Dickens; and that this upstart little truth alone would revel in explanations that I should for the time have feverishly to forego. The exquisite matter was not the identification with the scene of special shades or names; it was just that the whole Dickens procession marched up and down, the whole Dickens world looked out of its queer, quite sinister windows—for it was the socially sinister Dickens, I am afraid, rather than the socially encouraging or confoundingly comic who still at that moment was most apt to

meet me with his reasons. Such a reason was just that look of the inscrutable riverward street, packed to blackness with accumulations of suffered experience, these, indescribably, disavowed and confessed at one and the same time, and with the fact of its blocked old Thames-side termination, a mere fact of more oppressive enclosure now, telling all sorts of vague loose stories about it.

V

Why, however, should I pick up so small a crumb from that mere brief first course at a banquet of initiation which was in the event to prolong itself through years and years?—unless indeed as a scrap of a specimen, chosen at hazard, of the prompt activity of a process by which my intelligence afterwards came to find itself more fed, I think, than from any other source at all, or, for that matter, from all other sources put together. A hundred more suchlike modest memories breathe upon me, each with its own dim little plea, as I turn to face them, but my idea is to deal somehow more conveniently with the whole gathered mass of my subsequent impressions in this order, a fruitage that I feel to have been only too abundantly stored. Half a dozen of those of a larger and more immediate dignity, incidents

more particularly of the rather invidiously so-called social contact, pull my sleeve as I pass ; but the long, backward-drawn train of the later life drags them along with it, lost and smothered in its spread—only one of them stands out or remains over, insisting on its place and hour, its felt distinguishability. To this day I feel again *that* roused emotion, my unsurpassably prized admission to the presence of the great George Eliot, whom I was taken to see, by one of the kind door-opening Norton ladies, by whom Mrs. Lewes's guarded portal at North Bank appeared especially penetrable, on a Sunday afternoon of April '69. Later occasions, after a considerable lapse, were not to overlay the absolute face-value, as I may call it, of all the appearances then and there presented me—which were taken home by a young spirit almost abjectly grateful, at any rate all devoutly prepared, for them. I find it idle even to wonder what "place" the author of Silas Marner and Middlemarch may be conceived to have in the pride of our literature—so settled and consecrated in the individual range of view

is many such a case free at last to find itself, free after ups and downs, after fluctuations of fame or whatever, which have divested judgment of any relevance that isn't most of all the relevance of a living and recorded *relation*. It has ceased then to know itself in any degree as an estimate, has shaken off the anxieties of circumspection and comparison and just grown happy to act as an attachment pure and simple, an effect of life's own logic, but in the ashes of which the wonted fires of youth need but to be blown upon for betrayal of a glow. Reflective appreciation may have originally been concerned, whether at its most or at its least, but it is well over, to our infinite relief—yes, to our immortal comfort, I think ; the interval back cannot again be bridged. We simply sit with our enjoyed gain, our residual rounded possession in our lap ; a safe old treasure, which has ceased to shrink, if indeed also perhaps greatly to swell, and all that further touches it is the fine vibration set up if the name we know it all by is called into question—perhaps however little.

It was by George Eliot's name that I was to go on knowing, was never to cease to know, a great treasure of beauty and humanity, of applied and achieved art, a testimony, historic as well as aesthetic, to the deeper interest of the intricate English aspects ; and I now allow the vibration, as I have called it, all its play—quite as if I had been wronged even by my own hesitation as to whether to pick up my anecdote. That scruple wholly fades with the sense of how I must at the very time have foreseen that here was one of those associations that would determine in the far future an exquisite inability to revise it. Middlemarch had not then appeared —we of the faith were still to enjoy that saturation, and Felix Holt the radical was upwards of three years old ; the impetus proceeding from this work, however, was still fresh enough in my pulses to have quickened the palpitation of my finding myself in presence. I had rejoiced without reserve in Felix Holt—the illusion of reading which, outstretched on my then too frequently inevitable bed at Swampscott during a couple of very hot days of the summer of 1866,

comes back to me, followed by that in sooth of sitting up again, at no great ease, to indite with all promptness a review of the delightful thing, the place of appearance of which nothing could now induce me to name, shameless about the general fact as I may have been at the hour itself: over such a feast of fine rich natural tone did I feel myself earnestly bend. Quite unforgettable to me the art and truth with which the note of this tone was struck in the beautiful prologue and the bygone appearances, a hundred of the outward and visible signs of the author's own young rural and midmost England, made to hold us by their harmony. The book was not, if I rightly remember, altogether genially greeted, but I was to hold fast to the charm I had thankfully suffered it, I had been conscious of absolutely needing it, to work.

Exquisite the remembrance of how it wouldn't have "done" for me at all, in relation to other inward matters, not to strain from the case the last drop of its happiest sense. And I had even with the cooling of the first glow so little gone back upon it, as we have nowadays

learned to say, had in fact so gone forward, floated by its wave of superlative intended benignity, that, once in the cool quiet drawing-room at North Bank I knew myself steeped in still deeper depths of the medium. G. H. Lewes was absent for the time on an urgent errand ; one of his sons, on a visit at the house, had been suddenly taken with a violent attack of pain, the heritage of a bad accident not long before in the West Indies, a suffered onset from an angry bull, I seem to recall, who had tossed or otherwise mauled him, and, though beaten off, left him considerably compromised—these facts being promptly imparted to us, in no small flutter, by our distinguished lady, who came in to us from another room, where she had been with the hapless young man while his father appealed to the nearest good chemist for some known specific. It infinitely moved me to see so great a celebrity quite humanly and familiarly agitated—even with something clear and noble in it too, to which, as well as to the extraordinarily interesting dignity of her whole odd personal conformation, I remember thinking

her black silk dress and the lace mantilla attached to her head and keeping company on either side with the low-falling thickness of her dark hair effectively contributed. I have found myself, my life long, attaching value to every noted thing in respect to a great person—and George Eliot struck me on the spot as somehow *illustratively* great; never at any rate has the impression of those troubled moments faded from me, nor that at once of a certain high grace in her anxiety and a frank immediate appreciation of our presence, modest embarrassed folk as we were. It took me no long time to thrill with the sense, sublime in its unexpectedness, that we were perhaps, or indeed quite clearly, helping her to pass the time till Mr. Lewes's return—after which he would again post off for Mr. Paget the pre-eminent surgeon; and I see involved with this the perfect amenity of her assisting us, as it were, to assist her, through unrelinquished proper talk, due responsible remark and report, in the last degree suggestive to me, on a short holiday taken with Mr. Lewes in the south of France, whence they had just

returned. Yes indeed, the lightest words of great persons are so little as any words of others are that I catch myself again inordinately struck with her dropping it off-hand that the mistral, scourge of their excursion, had blown them into Avignon, where they had gone, I think, to see J. S. Mill, only to blow them straight out again —the figure put it so before us ; as well as with the moral interest, the absence of the *banal*, in their having, on the whole scene, found pleasure further poisoned by the frequency in all those parts of "evil faces: oh the evil faces!" *That* recorded source of suffering enormously affected me—I felt it as beautifully characteristic: I had never heard an *impression de voyage* so little tainted with the superficial or the vulgar. I was myself at the time in the thick of impressions, and it was true that they would have seemed to me rather to fail of life, of their own doubtless inferior kind, if submitting beyond a certain point to be touched with that sad or, as who should say, that grey colour: Mrs. Lewes's were, it appeared, predominantly so touched, and I could at once admire it in them and

wonder if they didn't pay for this by some lack of intensity on other sides. Why I didn't more impute to her, or to them, that possible lack is more than I can say, since under the law of moral earnestness the vulgar and the trivial would be then involved in the poor observations of my own making—a conclusion sufficiently depressing.

However, I didn't find myself depressed, and I didn't find the great mind that was so good as to shine upon us at that awkward moment however dimly anything but augmented; what was its sensibility to the evil faces but part of the large old tenderness which the occasion had caused to overflow and on which we were presently floated back into the room she had left? —where we might perhaps beguile a little the impatience of the sufferer waiting for relief. We ventured in our flutter to doubt whether we *should* beguile, we held back with a certain delicacy from this irruption, and if there was a momentary wonderful and beautiful conflict I remember how our yielding struck me as crowned with the finest grace it could possibly

have, that of the prodigious privilege of humouring, yes literally humouring so renowned a spirit at a moment when we could really match our judgment with hers. For the injured young man, in the other and the larger room, simply lay stretched on his back on the floor, the posture apparently least painful to him —though painful enough at the best I easily saw on kneeling beside him, after my first dismay, to ask if I could in any way ease him. I see his face again, fair and young and flushed, with its vague little smile and its moist brow; I recover the moment or two during which we sought to make natural conversation in his presence, and my question as to what conversation *was* natural; and then as his father's return still failed my having the inspiration that at once terminated the strain of the scene and yet prolonged the sublime connection. Mightn't *I* then hurry off for Mr. Paget?—on whom, as fast as a cab could carry me, I would wait with the request that he would come at the first possible moment to the rescue. Mrs. Lewes's and our stricken companion's instant appreciation of

this offer lent me wings on which I again feel myself borne very much as if suddenly acting as a messenger of the gods—surely I had never come so near to performing in that character. I shook off my fellow visitor for swifter cleaving of the air, and I recall still feeling that I cleft it even in the dull four-wheeler of other days which, on getting out of the house, I recognised as the only object animating, at a distance, the long blank Sunday vista beside the walled-out Regent's Park. I crawled to Hanover Square —or was it Cavendish? I let the question stand—and, after learning at the great man's door that though he was not at home he was soon expected back and would receive my message without delay, cherished for the rest of the day the particular quality of my vibration.

It was doubtless even excessive in proportion to its cause—yet in what else but that consisted the force and the use of vibrations? It was by their excess that one knew them for such, as one for that matter only knew things in general worth knowing. I didn't know what I had expected as an effect of our offered homage, but

I had somehow not, at the best, expected a relation—and now a relation had been dramatically determined. It would exist for me if I should never again in all the world ask a feather's weight of it; for myself, that is, it would simply never be able not somehow to act. Its virtue was not in truth at all flagrantly to be put to the proof—any opportunity for that underwent at the best a considerable lapse; but why wasn't it intensely acting, none the less, during the time when, before being in London again for any length of stay, I found it intimately concerned in my perusal of Middlemarch, so soon then to appear, and even in that of Deronda, its intervention on behalf of which defied any chill of time? And to these references I can but subjoin that they obviously most illustrate the operation of a sense for drama. The process of appropriation of the two fictions was experience, in great intensity, and roundabout the field was drawn the distinguishable ring of something that belonged equally to this condition and that embraced and further vivified the imaged mass, playing in upon it lights of

surpassing fineness. So it was, at any rate, that my "relation"—for I didn't go so far as to call it "ours"—helped me to squeeze further values from the intrinsic substance of the copious final productions I have named, a weight of variety, dignity and beauty of which I have never allowed my measure to shrink.

Even this example of a rage for connections, I may also remark, doesn't deter me from the mention here, somewhat out of its order of time, of another of those in which my whole privilege of reference to Mrs. Lewes, such as it remained, was to look to be preserved. I stretch over the years a little to overtake it, and it calls up at once another person, the ornament, or at least the diversion, of a society long since extinct to me, but who, in common with every bearer of a name I yield to the temptation of writing, insists on profiting promptly by the fact of inscription—very much as if first tricking me into it and then proving it upon me. The extinct societies that once were so sure of themselves, how can they *not* stir again if the right touch, that of a hand they actually knew, how-

ever little they may have happened to heed it, reaches tenderly back to them? The touch *is* the retrieval, so far as it goes, setting up as it does heaven knows what undefeated continuity. I must have been present among the faithful at North Bank during a Sunday afternoon or two of the winter of '77 and '78—I was to see the great lady alone but on a single occasion before her death ; but those attestations are all but lost to me now in the livelier pitch of a scene, as I can only call it, of which I feel myself again, all amusedly, rather as sacrificed witness. I had driven over with Mrs. Greville from Milford Cottage, in Surrey, to the villa George Eliot and George Lewes had not long before built themselves, and which they much inhabited, at Witley—this indeed, I well remember, in no great flush of assurance that my own measure of our intended felicity would be quite that of my buoyant hostess. But here exactly comes, with my memory of Mrs. Greville, from which numberless by-memories dangle, the interesting question that makes for my recall why things happened, under her much-waved wing, not in

any too coherent fashion—and this even though it was never once given her, I surmise, to guess that they anywhere fell short. So gently used, all round indeed, was this large, elegant, extremely near-sighted and extremely demonstrative lady, whose genius was all for friendship, admiration, declamation and expenditure, that one doubted whether in the whole course of her career she had ever once been brought up, as it were, against a recognised reality; other at least perhaps than the tiresome cost of the materially agreeable in life and the perverse appearance, at times, that though she "said" things, otherwise recited choice morceaux, whether French or English, with a marked oddity of manner, of "attack", a general incongruity of drawing-room art, the various contributive elements, hour, scene, persuaded patience and hushed attention, were perforce a precarious quantity.

It is in that bygone old grace of the unexploded factitious, the air of a thousand dimmed illusions and more or less early Victorian beatitudes on the part of the blandly idle and the

supposedly accomplished, that Mrs. Greville, with her exquisite goodnature and her innocent fatuity, is embalmed for me; so that she becomes in that light a truly shining specimen, almost the image or compendium of a whole side of a social order. Just so she has happy suggestion; just so, whether or no by a twist of my mind toward the enviability of certain complacencies of faith and taste that we would yet neither live back into if we could, nor can catch again if we would, I see my forgotten friend of that moist autumn afternoon of our call, and of another, on the morrow, which I shall not pass over, as having rustled and gushed and protested and performed through her term under a kind of protection by the easy-going gods that is not of this fierce age. Amiabilities and absurdities, harmless serenities and vanities, pretensions and undertakings unashamed, still profited by the mildness of the critical air and the benignity of the social—on the right side at least of the social line. It had struck me from the first that nowhere so much as in England was it fortunate to *be* fortunate, and

that against that condition, once it had somehow been handed down and determined, a number of the sharp truths that one might privately apprehend beat themselves beautifully in vain. I say beautifully for I confess without scruple to have found again and again at that time an attaching charm in the general exhibition of enjoyed immunity, paid for as it was almost always by the personal amenity, the practice of all sorts of pleasantness ; if it kept the gods themselves for the time in goodhumour, one was willing enough, or at least I was, to be on the side of the gods. Unmistakeable too, as I seem to recover it, was the positive interest of watching and noting, roundabout one, for the turn, or rather for the blest continuity, of their benevolence : such an appeal proceeded, in this, that and the other particular case, from the fool's paradise really rounded and preserved, before one's eyes, for those who were so good as to animate it. There was always the question of how long they would be left to, and the growth of one's fine suspense, not to say one's frank little gratitude, as the miracle repeated itself.

All of which, I admit, dresses in many reflections the small circumstance that Milford Cottage, with its innumerable red candles and candle-shades, had affected me as the most embowered retreat for social innocence that it was possible to conceive, and as absolutely settling the question of whether the practice of pleasantness mightn't quite ideally pay for the fantastic protectedness. The red candles in the red shades have remained with me, inexplicably, as a vivid note of this pitch, shedding their rosy light, with the autumn gale, the averted reality, all shut out, upon such felicities of feminine helplessness as I couldn't have prefigured in advance and as exemplified, for further gathering in, the possibilities of the old tone. Nowhere had the evening curtains seemed so drawn, nowhere the copious service so soft, nowhere the second volume of the new novel, "half-uncut", so close to one's hand, nowhere the exquisite head and incomparable brush of the domesticated collie such an attestation of *that* standard at least, nowhere the harmonies of accident—of intention was more than one could say—so

incapable of a wrong deflection. That society would lack the highest finish without some such distributed clusters of the thoroughly gentle, the mildly presumptuous and the inveterately mistaken, was brought home to me there, in fine, to a tune with which I had no quarrel, perverse enough as I had been from an early time to know but the impulse to egg on society to the fullest discharge of any material stirring within its breast and not making for cruelty or brutality, mere baseness or mere stupidity, that would fall into a picture or a scene. The quality of serene anxiety on the part for instance of exquisite Mrs. Thellusson, Mrs. Greville's mother, was by itself a plea for any privilege one should fancy her perched upon ; and I scarce know if this be more or be less true because the anxiety—at least as I culled its fragrance—was all about the most secondary and superfluous small matters alone. It struck me, I remember, as a new and unexpected form of the pathetic altogether ; and there was no form of the pathetic, any more than of the tragic or the comic, that didn't serve as another pearl for one's

lengthening string. And I pass over what was doubtless the happiest stroke in the composition, the fact of its involving, as all-distinguished husband of the other daughter, an illustrious soldier and servant of his sovereign, of his sovereigns that were successively to be, than against whose patient handsome bearded presence the whole complexus of femininities and futilities couldn't have been left in more tolerated and more contrasted relief ; pass it over to remind myself of how, in my particular friend of the three, the comic and the tragic were presented in a confusion that made the least intended of them at any moment take effectively the place of the most. The impression, that is, was never that of the sentiment operating—save indeed perhaps when the dear lady applied her faculty for frank imitation of the ridiculous, which she then quite directly and remarkably achieved ; but that she could be comic, that she *was* comic, was what least appeased her unrest, and there were reasons enough, in a word, why her failure of the grand manner or the penetrating note should evoke the idea of their

opposites perfectly achieved. She sat, alike in adoration and emulation, at the feet of my admirable old friend Fanny Kemble, the good-nature of whose consent to "hear" her was equalled only by the immediately consequent action of the splendidly corrective spring on the part of that unsurpassed subject of the dramatic afflatus fairly, or, as I should perhaps above all say, contradictiously provoked. Then aspirant and auditor, rash adventurer and shy alarmist, were swept away together in the gust of magnificent rightness and beauty, no scrap of the far-scattered prime proposal being left to pick up.

Which detail of reminiscence has again stayed my course to the Witley Villa, when even on the way I quaked a little with my sense of what *generally* most awaited or overtook my companion's prime proposals. What had come most to characterise the Leweses to my apprehension was that there couldn't be a thing in the world about which they weren't, and on the most conceded and assured grounds, almost scientifically particular; which presumption, however, only added to the relevance of one's

learning how such a matter as their relation with Mrs. Greville could in accordance with noble consistencies be carried on. I could trust *her* for it perfectly, as she knew no law but that of innocent and exquisite aberration, never wanting and never less than consecrating, and I fear I but took refuge for the rest in declining all responsibility. I remember trying to say to myself that, even such as we were, our visit couldn't but scatter a little the weight of cloud on the Olympus we scaled—given the dreadful drenching afternoon we were after all an imaginable short solace there; and this indeed would have borne me through to the end save for an incident which, with a quite ideal logic, left our adventure an approved ruin. I see again our bland, benign, commiserating hostess beside the fire in a chill desert of a room where the master of the house guarded the opposite hearthstone, and I catch once more the impression of no occurrence of anything at all appreciable but their liking us to have come, with our terribly trivial contribution, mainly from a prevision of how they should more devoutly like it when we

departed. It is remarkable, but the occasion yields me no single echo of a remark on the part of any of us—nothing more than the sense that our great author herself peculiarly suffered from the fury of the elements, and that they had about them rather the minimum of the paraphernalia of reading and writing, not to speak of that of tea, a conceivable feature of the hour, but which was not provided for. Again I felt touched with privilege, but not, as in '69, with a form of it redeemed from barrenness by a motion of my own, and the taste of barrenness was in fact in my mouth under the effect of our taking leave. We did so with considerable flourish till we had passed out to the hall again, indeed to the door of the waiting carriage, toward which G. H. Lewes himself all sociably, *then* above all conversingly, wafted us—yet staying me by a sudden remembrance before I had entered the brougham and signing me to wait while he repaired his omission. I returned to the doorstep, whence I still see him reissue from the room we had just left and hurry toward me across the hall shaking high the pair of

blue-bound volumes his allusion to the uninvited, the verily importunate loan of which by Mrs. Greville had lingered on the air after his dash in quest of them; "Ah those books—take them away, please, away, away!" I hear him unreservedly plead while he thrusts them again at me, and I scurry back into our conveyance, where, and where only, settled afresh with my companion, I venture to assure myself of the horrid truth that had squinted at me as I relieved our good friend of his superfluity. What indeed was this superfluity but the two volumes of my own precious "last"—we were still in the blest age of volumes—presented by its author to the lady of Milford Cottage, and by her, misguided votary, dropped with the best conscience in the world into the Witley abyss, out of which it had jumped with violence, under the touch of accident, straight up again into my own exposed face?

The bruise inflicted there I remember feeling for the moment only as sharp, such a mixture of delightful small questions at once salved it over and such a charm in particular for me to

my recognising that this particular wrong—inflicted all unawares, which exactly made it sublime—was the only rightness of our visit. Our hosts hadn't so much as connected book with author, or author with visitor, or visitor with anything but the convenience of his ridding them of an unconsidered trifle; grudging as they so justifiedly did the impingement of such matters on their consciousness. The vivid demonstration of one's failure to penetrate there had been in the sweep of Lewes's gesture, which could scarce have been bettered by his actually wielding a broom. I think nothing passed between us in the brougham on revelation of the identity of the offered treat so emphatically declined—I see that I couldn't have laughed at it to the confusion of my gentle neighbour. But I quite recall my grasp of the *interest* of our distinguished friends' inaccessibility to the unattended plea, with the light it seemed to throw on what it was really to *be* attended. Never, never save as attended—by presumptions, that is, far other than any then hanging about one—would one so much as desire *not* to be pushed

out of sight. I needn't attempt, however, to supply all the links in the chain of association which led to my finally just qualified beatitude: I had been served right enough in all conscience, but the pity was that Mrs. Greville had been. This I never wanted for her; and I may add, in the connection, that I discover now no grain of false humility in my having enjoyed in my own person adorning such a tale. There was positively a fine high thrill in thinking of persons—or at least of a person, for any fact about Lewes was but derivative—engaged in my own pursuit and yet detached, by what I conceived, detached by a pitch of intellectual life, from all that made it actual to myself. *There* was the lift of contemplation, there the inspiring image and the big supporting truth; the pitch of intellectual life in the very fact of which we seemed, my hostess and I, to have caught our celebrities sitting in that queer bleak way wouldn't have bullied me in the least if it hadn't been the centre of such a circle of gorgeous creation. It was the fashion among the profane in short either to misdoubt, before George

Eliot's canvas, the latter's backing of rich thought, or else to hold that this matter of philosophy, and even if but of the philosophic vocabulary, thrust itself through to the confounding of the picture. But with that thin criticism I wasn't, as I have already intimated, to have a moment's patience ; I was to become, I was to remain—I take pleasure in repeating—even a very Derondist of Derondists, for my own wanton joy : which amounts to saying that I found the figured, coloured tapestry *always* vivid enough to brave no matter what complication of the stitch.

VI

I TAKE courage to confess moreover that I am carried further still by the current on which Mrs. Greville, friend of the supereminent, happens to have launched me; for I can neither forbear a glance at one or two of the other adventures promoted by her, nor in the least dissociate her from that long aftertaste of them, such as they were, which I have positively cultivated. I ask myself first, however, whether or no our drive to Aldworth, on the noble height of Blackdown, had been preceded by the couple of occasions in London on which I was to feel I saw the Laureate most at his ease, yet on reflection concluding that the first of these—and the fewest days must have separated them—formed my prime introduction to the poet I had earliest known and best loved. The revelational evening I speak of is peopled, to my memory, not

a little, yet with a confusedness out of which Tennyson's own presence doesn't at all distinctly emerge; he was occupying a house in Eaton Place, as appeared then his wont, for the earlier weeks of the spring, and I seem to recover that I had "gone on" to it, after dining somewhere else, under protection of my supremely kind old friend the late Lord Houghton, to whom I was indebted in those years for a most promiscuous befriending. He must have been of the party, and Mrs. Greville quite independently must, since I catch again the vision of her, so expansively and voluminously seated that she might fairly have been couchant, so to say, for the proposed characteristic act—there was a deliberation about it that precluded the idea of a spring; that, namely, of addressing something of the Laureate's very own to the Laureate's very face. Beyond the sense that he took these things with a gruff philosophy—and could always repay them, on the spot, in heavily-shovelled coin of the same mint, since it *was* a question of his genius—I gather in again no determined impression, unless it may have been,

as could only be probable, the effect of fond prefigurements utterly blighted.

The fond prefigurements of youthful piety are predestined more often than not, I think, experience interfering, to strange and violent shocks ; from which no general appeal is conceivable save by the prompt preclusion either of faith or of knowledge, a sad choice at the best. No other such illustration recurs to me of the possible refusal of those two conditions of an acquaintance to recognise each other at a given hour as the silent crash of which I was to be conscious several years later, in Paris, when placed in presence of M. Ernest Renan, from the surpassing distinction of whose literary face, with its exquisite finish of every feature, I had from far back extracted every sort of shining gage, a presumption general and positive. Widely enough to sink all interest—that was the dreadful thing—opened there the chasm between the implied, as I had taken it, and the attested, as I had, at the first blush, to take it ; so that one was in fact scarce to know what might have happened if interest hadn't by good

fortune already reached such a compass as to stick half way down the descent. What interest *can* survive becomes thus, surely, as much one of the lessons of life as the number of ways in which it remains impossible. What comes up in face of the shocks, as I have called them, is the question of a shift of every supposition, a change of base under fire, as it were ; which must take place successfully if one's advance be not abandoned altogether. I remember that I saw the Tennyson directly presented as just utterly other than the Tennyson indirectly, and if the readjustment, for acquaintance, was less difficult than it was to prove in the case of the realised Renan the obligation to accept the difference—wholly as difference and without reference to strict loss or gain—was like a rap on the knuckles of a sweet superstition. Fine, fine, fine could he only be—fine in the sense of that quality in the texture of his verse, which had appealed all along by its most inward principle to one's taste, and had by the same stroke shown with what a force of lyric energy and sincerity the kind of beauty so engaged for could be

associated. Was it that I had preconceived him in that light as pale and penetrating, as emphasising in every aspect the fact that he was fastidious? was it that I had supposed him more fastidious than really *could* have been—at the best for that effect? was it that the grace of the man *couldn't*, by my measure, but march somehow with the grace of the poet, given a perfection of this grace? was it in fine that style of a particular kind, when so highly developed, seemed logically to leave no room for other quite contradictious kinds? These were considerations of which I recall the pressure, at the same time that I fear I have no account of them to give after they have fairly faced the full, the monstrous demonstration that Tennyson was not Tennysonian. The desperate sequel to that was that he thereby changed one's own state too, one's beguiled, one's aesthetic; for what *could* this strange apprehension do but reduce the Tennysonian amount altogether? It dried up, to a certain extent, that is, in my own vessel of sympathy—leaving me so to ask whether it was before or after that I should

take myself for the bigger fool. There had been folly somewhere ; yet let me add that once I recognised this, once I felt the old fond pitch drop of itself, not alone inevitably, but very soon quite conveniently and while I magnanimously granted that the error had been mine and nobody's else at all, an odd prosaic pleasantness set itself straight up, substitutionally, over the whole ground, which it swept clear of every single premeditated effect. It made one's perceptive condition purely profane, reduced it somehow to having rather the excess of awkwardness than the excess of felicity to reckon with ; yet still again, as I say, enabled a compromise to work.

The compromise in fact worked beautifully under my renewal of impression—for which a second visit at Eaton Place offered occasion ; and this even though I had to interweave with the scene as best I might a highly complicating influence. To speak of James Russell Lowell's influence as above all complicating on any scene to the interest of which he contributed may superficially seem a perverse appreciation of it ;

and yet in the light of that truth only do I recover the full sense of his value, his interest, the moving moral of his London adventure—to find myself already bumping so straight against which gives me, I confess, a sufficiently portentous shake. He comes in, as it were, by a force not to be denied, as soon as I look at him again—as soon as I find him for instance on the doorstep in Eaton Place at the hour of my too approaching it for luncheon as he had just done. There he is, with the whole question of him, at once before me, and literally superimposed by that fact on any minor essence. I quake, positively, with the apprehension of the commemorative dance he may lead me ; but for the moment, just here, I steady myself with an effort and go in with him to his having the Laureate's personal acquaintance, by every symptom, and rather to my surprise, all to make. Mrs. Tennyson's luncheon table was an open feast, with places for possible when not assured guests ; and no one but the American Minister, scarce more than just installed, and his extremely attached compatriot sat down at first with our

gracious hostess. The board considerably stretched, and after it had been indicated to Lowell that he had best sit at the end near the window, where the Bard would presently join him, I remained, near our hostess, separated from him for some little time by an unpeopled waste. Hallam came in all genially and auspiciously, yet only to brush us with his blessing and say he was lunching elsewhere, and my wonder meanwhile hung about the representative of my country, who, though partaking of offered food, appeared doomed to disconnection from us. I may say at once that my wonder was always unable *not* to hang about this admired and cherished friend when other persons, especially of the eminent order, were concerned in the scene. The case was quite other for the unshared relation, or when it was shared by one or other of three or four of our common friends who had the gift of determining happily the pitch of ease ; suspense, not to say anxiety, as to the possible turn or drift of the affair quite dropped—I rested then, we alike rested, I ever felt, in a golden confidence. This

last was so definitely not the note of my attention to him, so far as I might indulge it, in the wider social world, that I shall not scruple, occasion offering, to inquire into the reasons of the difference. For I can only see the ghosts of my friends, by this token, as "my" J. R. L. and whoever; which means that my imagination, of the wanton life of which these remarks pretend but to form the record, had appropriated them, under the prime contact—from the moment the prime contact had successfully worked—once for all, and contributed the light in which they were constantly exposed.

Yes, delightful I shall undertake finding it, and perhaps even making it, to read J. R. L.'s exposure back into *its* light; which I in fact see begin to shine for me more amply during those very minutes of our wait for our distinguished host and even the several that followed the latter's arrival and his seating himself opposite the unknown guest, whose identity he had failed to grasp. Nothing, exactly, could have made dear Lowell more "my" Lowell, as I have presumed to figure him, than the stretch of uncer-

tainty so supervening and which, in its form of silence at first completely unbroken between the two poets, rapidly took on for me monstrous proportions. I conversed with my gentle neighbour during what seemed an eternity—really but hearing, as the minutes sped, all that Tennyson didn't say to Lowell and all that Lowell wouldn't on any such compulsion as that say to Tennyson. I like, however, to hang again upon the hush—for the sweetness of the relief of its break by the fine Tennysonian growl. I had never dreamed, no, of a growling Tennyson —I had too utterly otherwise fantasticated ; but no line of Locksley Hall rolled out as I was to happen soon after to hear it, could have been sweeter than the interrogative sound of "Do you know anything about *Lowell?*" launched on the chance across the table and crowned at once by Mrs. Tennyson's anxious quaver: "Why, my dear, this *is* Mr. Lowell!" The clearance took place successfully enough, and the incident, I am quite aware, seems to shrink with it ; in spite of which I still cherish the reduced reminiscence for its connections: so far

as my vision of Lowell was concerned they began at that moment so to multiply. A belated guest or two more came in, and I wish I could for my modesty's sake refer to this circumstance alone the fact that nothing more of the occasion survives for me save the intense but restricted glow of certain instants, in another room, to which we had adjourned for smoking and where my alarmed sense of the Bard's restriction to giving what he had as a bard only became under a single turn of his hand a vision of quite general munificence. Incredibly, inconceivably, he had *read*—and not only read but admired, and not only admired but understandingly referred ; referred, time and some accident aiding, the appreciated object, a short tale I had lately put forth, to its actually present author, who could scarce believe his ears on hearing the thing superlatively commended ; pronounced, that is, by the illustrious speaker, more to his taste than no matter what other like attempt. Nothing would induce me to disclose the title of the piece, which has little to do with the matter ; my point is but in its having on the spot been

matter of pure romance to me that I was there and positively so addressed. For it was a solution, the happiest in the world, and from which I at once extracted enormities of pleasure: my relation to whatever had bewildered me simply became perfect: the author of In Memoriam had "liked" my own twenty pages, and his doing so was a gage of his grace in which I felt I should rest forever—in which I have in fact rested to this hour. My own basis of liking—such a blessed supersession of all worryings and wonderings!—was accordingly established, and has met every demand made of it.

Greatest was to have been, I dare say, the demand to which I felt it exposed by the drive over to Aldworth with Mrs. Greville which I noted above and which took place, if I am not mistaken, on the morrow of our drive to Witley. A different shade of confidence and comfort, I make out, accompanied this experiment: I believed more, for reasons I shall not now attempt to recover, in the furthermost maintenance of our flying bridge, the final piers of which, it was indubitable, *had* at Witley given

way. What could have been moreover less like G. H. Lewes's valedictory hurl back upon us of the printed appeal in which I was primarily concerned than that so recent and so directly opposed passage of the Eaton Place smoking-room, thanks to which I could nurse a certified security all along the road? I surrendered to security, I perhaps even grossly took my ease in it; and I was to breathe from beginning to end of our visit, which began with our sitting again at luncheon, an air—so unlike that of Witley! —in which it seemed to me frankly that nothing but the blest obvious, or at least the blest outright, could so much as attempt to live. These elements hung sociably and all auspiciously about us—it was a large and simple and almost empty occasion; yet empty without embarrassment, rather as from a certain high guardedness or defensiveness of situation, literally indeed from the material, the local sublimity, the fact of our all upliftedly hanging together over one of the grandest sweeps of view in England. Remembered passages again people, however, in their proportion, the excess of opportunity;

each with that conclusive note of the outright all unadorned. What could have partaken more of this quality for instance than the question I was startled to hear launched before we had left the table by the chance of Mrs. Greville's having happened to mention in some connection one of her French relatives, Mademoiselle Laure de Sade? It had fallen on my own ear—the mention at least had—with a certain effect of unconscious provocation; but this was as nothing to its effect on the ear of our host. "De Sade?" he at once exclaimed with interest—and with the consequence, I may frankly add, of my wondering almost to ecstasy, that is to the ecstasy of curiosity, to what length he would proceed. He proceeded admirably—admirably for the triumph of simplification—to the very greatest length imaginable, as was signally promoted by the fact that clearly no one present, with a single exception, recognised the name or the nature of the scandalous, the long ignored, the at last all but unnameable author; least of all the gentle relative of Mademoiselle Laure, who listened with the blankest grace to

her friend's enumeration of his titles to infamy, among which that of his most notorious work was pronounced. It was the homeliest, frankest, most domestic passage, as who should say, and most remarkable for leaving none of us save myself, by my impression, in the least embarrassed or bewildered ; largely, I think, because of the failure—a failure the most charmingly flat—of all measure on the part of auditors and speaker alike of what might be intended or understood, of what, in fine, the latter was talking about.

He struck me in truth as neither knowing nor communicating knowledge, and I recall how I felt this note in his own case to belong to that general intimation with which the whole air was charged of the want of proportion between the great spaces and reaches and echoes commanded, the great eminence attained, and the quantity and variety of experience supposable. So to discriminate was in a manner to put one's hand on the key, and thereby to find one's self in presence of a rare and anomalous, but still scarcely the less beautiful fact. The assured

and achieved conditions, the serenity, the security, the success, to put it vulgarly, shone in the light of their easiest law—that by which they emerge early from the complication of life, the great adventure of sensibility, and find themselves determined once for all, fortunately fixed, all consecrated and consecrating. If I should speak of this impression as that of glory without history, that of the poetic character more worn than paid for, or at least more saved than spent, I should doubtless much over-emphasise ; but such, or something like it, was none the less the explanation that met one's own fond fancy of the scene after one had cast about for it. For I allow myself thus to repeat that I was so moved to cast about, and perhaps at no moment more than during the friendly analysis of the reputation of M. de Sade. Was I not present at some undreamed-of demonstration of the absence of the remoter real, the real other than immediate and exquisite, other than guaranteed and enclosed, in landscape, friendship, fame, above all in consciousness of awaited and admired and self-consistent inspiration?

The question was indeed to be effectively answered for me, and everything meanwhile continued to play into this prevision—even to the pleasant growling note heard behind me, as the Bard followed with Mrs. Greville, who had permitted herself apparently some mild extravagance of homage: "Oh yes, you may do what you like—so long as you don't kiss me before the cabman!" The allusion was explained for us, if I remember—a matter of some more or less recent leave-taking of admirer and admired in London on his putting her down at her door after being taken to the play or wherever; between the rugged humour of which reference and the other just commemorated there wasn't a pin to choose, it struck me, for a certain old-time Lincolnshire ease or comfortable stay-at-home license. But it was later on, when, my introductress having accompanied us, I sat upstairs with him in his study, that he might read to us some poem of his own that we should venture to propose, it was then that mystifications dropped, that everything in the least dislocated fell into its place, and that image

and picture stamped themselves strongly and finally, or to the point even, as I recover it, of leaving me almost too little to wonder about. He had not got a third of the way through Locksley Hall, which, my choice given me, I had made bold to suggest he should spout—for I had already heard him spout in Eaton Place—before I had begun to wonder that I didn't wonder, didn't at least wonder more consumedly ; as a very little while back I should have made sure of my doing on any such prodigious occasion. I sat at one of the windows that hung over space, noting how the windy, watery autumn day, sometimes sheeting it all with rain, called up the dreary, dreary moorland or the long dun wolds ; I pinched myself for the determination of my identity and hung on the reader's deep-voiced chant for the credibility of his : I asked myself in fine why, in complete deviation from everything that would have seemed from far back certain for the case, I failed to swoon away under the heaviest pressure I had doubtless ever known the romantic situation bring to bear. So lucidly all the while I con-

sidered, so detachedly I judged, so dissentingly, to tell the whole truth, I listened; pinching myself, as I say, not at all to keep from swooning, but much rather to set up some rush of sensibility. It was all interesting, it was at least all odd; but why in the name of poetic justice had one anciently heaved and flushed with one's own recital of the splendid stuff if one was now only to sigh in secret "Oh dear, oh dear"? The author lowered the whole pitch, that of expression, that of interpretation above all; I heard him, in cool surprise, take even more out of his verse than he had put in, and so bring me back to the point I had immediately and privately made, the point that he wasn't Tennysonian. I felt him as he went on and on lose that character beyond repair, and no effect of the organ-roll, of monotonous majesty, no suggestion of the long echo, availed at all to save it. What the case came to for me, I take it—and by the case I mean the intellectual, the artistic—was that it lacked the intelligence, the play of discrimination, I should have taken for granted in it, and thereby, brooding monster

that I was, born to discriminate *à tout propos*, lacked the interest.

Detached I have mentioned that I had become, and it was doubtless at such a rate high time for that; though I hasten to repeat that with the close of the incident I was happily able to feel a new sense in the whole connection established. My critical reaction hadn't in the least invalidated our great man's being a Bard—it had in fact made him and left him more a Bard than ever: it had only settled to my perception as not before what a Bard might and mightn't be. The character was just a rigid idiosyncrasy, to which everything in the man conformed, but which supplied nothing outside of itself, and which above all was not intellectually wasteful or heterogeneous, conscious as it could only be of its intrinsic breadth and weight. On two or three occasions of the aftertime I was to hear Browning read out certain of his finest pages, and this exactly with all the exhibition of point and authority, the expressive particularisation, so to speak, that I had missed on the part of the Laureate; an observation through which

the author of Men and Women appeared, in spite of the beauty and force of his demonstration, as little as possible a Bard. He particularised if ever a man did, was heterogeneous and profane, composed of pieces and patches that betrayed some creak of joints, and addicted to the excursions from which these were brought home; so that he had to *prove* himself a poet, almost against all presumptions, and with all the assurance and all the character he could use. Was not this last in especial, the character, so close to the surface, with which Browning fairly bristled, what was most to come out in his personal delivery of the fruit of his genius? It came out almost to harshness; but the result was that what he read showed extraordinary life. During that audition at Aldworth the question seemed on the contrary not of life at all—save, that is, of one's own; which was exactly not the question. With all the resonance of the chant, the whole thing was yet *still*, with all the long swing of its motion it yet remained where it was—heaving doubtless grandly enough up and down and beautiful to watch as through the

superposed veils of its long self-consciousness. By all of which I don't mean to say that I was not, on the day at Aldworth, thoroughly reconciled to learning what a Bard consisted of ; for that came as soon as I had swallowed my own mistake—the mistake of having supposed Tennyson something subtly other than one. I had supposed, probably, such an impossibility, had, to repeat my term, so absurdly fantasticated, that the long journey round and about the truth no more than served me right ; just as after all it at last left me quite content.

VII

It left me moreover, I become aware—or at least it now leaves me—fingering the loose ends of this particular free stretch of my tapestry; so that, with my perhaps even extravagant aversion to loose ends, I can but try for a moment to interweave them. There dangles again for me least confusedly, I think, the vision of a dinner at Mrs. Greville's—and I like even to remember that Cadogan Place, where memories hang thick for me, was the scene of it—which took its light from the presence of Louisa Lady Waterford, who took hers in turn from that combination of rare beauty with rare talent which the previous Victorian age had for many years not ceased to acclaim. It insists on coming back to me with the utmost vividness that Lady Waterford was illustrational, historically, preciously so, meeting

one's largest demand for the blest recovery, when possible, of some glimmer of the sense of personal beauty, to say nothing of personal "accomplishment", as our fathers were appointed to enjoy it. Scarce to be sated that form of wonder, to my own imagination, I confess—so that I fairly believe there was no moment at which I wouldn't have been ready to turn my back for the time even on the most triumphant actuality of form and feature if a chance apprehension of a like force as it played on the sensibility of the past had competed. And this for a reason I fear I can scarce explain —unless, when I come to consider it, by the perversity of a conviction that the conditions of beauty have improved, though those of character, in the fine old sense, may not, and that with these the measure of it is more just, the appreciation, as who should say, more competent and the effect more completely attained.

What the question seems thus to come to would be a consuming curiosity as to any cited old case of the spell in the very interest of one's catching it comparatively "out"; in the interest

positively of the likelihood of one's doing so, and this in the face of so many great testifying portraits. My private perversity, as I here glance at it, has had its difficulties—most of all possibly that of one's addiction, in growing older, to allowing a supreme force to one's earlier, even one's earliest, estimates of physical felicity; or in other words that of the felt impulse to leave the palm for good looks to those who have reached out to it through the medium of our own history. If the conditions *grow* better for them why then should we have almost the habit of thinking better of our handsome folk dead than of our living?—and even to the very point of not resenting on the part of others similarly affected the wail of wonder as to what has strangely "become" of the happy types *d'antan*. I dodge that inquiry just now—we may meet it again; noting simply the fact that "old" pretenders to the particular crown I speak of—and in the sense especially of the pretension made rather for than by them—offered to my eyes a greater interest than the new, whom I was ready enough to take for

granted, as one for the most part easily could; belonging as it exactly did on the other hand to the interest of their elders that *this* couldn't be so taken. That was just the attraction of the latter claim—that the grounds of it had to be made out, puzzled out verily on occasion, but that when they were recognised they had a force all their own. One would have liked to be able to clear the distinction between the new and the old of all ambiguity—explain, that is, how little the superficially invidious term was sometimes noted as having in common with the elderly: so much was it a clear light held up to the question that truly beautiful persons might be old without being elderly. Their juniors couldn't be new, unfortunately, without being youthful—unfortunately because the fact of youth, so far from dispelling ambiguity, positively introduced it. One made up one's mind thus that the only sure specimens were, and had to be, those acquainted with time, and with whom time, on its side, was acquainted; those in fine who had borne the test and still looked at it face to face. These were of one's

own period of course—one looked at *them* face to face ; one blessedly hadn't to consider them by hearsay or to refer to any portrait of them for proof : indeed in presence of the resisting, the gained, cases one found one's self practically averse to old facts or old traditions of portraiture, accompanied by no matter what names.

All of which leads by an avenue I trust not unduly majestic up to that hour of contemplation during which I could see quite enough for the major interest what was meant by Lady Waterford's great reputation. Nothing could in fact have been more informing than so to see what was meant, than so copiously to share with admirers who had had their vision and passed on ; for if I spoke above of her image as illustrational this is because it affected me on the spot as so diffusing information. My impression was of course but the old story—to which my reader will feel himself treated, I fear, to satiety : when once I had drawn the curtain for the light shed by this or that or the other personal presence upon the society more or less intimately concerned in producing it the last

thing I could think of was to darken the scene again. For this right or this wrong reason then Mrs. Greville's admirable guest struck me as flooding it; indebted in the highest degree to every art by which a commended appearance may have formed the habit of still suggesting commendation, she certainly—to my imagination at least—triumphed over time in the sense that if the years, in their generosity, went on helping her to live her grace returned the favour by paying life back to them. I mean that she reanimated for the fond analyst the age in which persons of her type could so greatly flourish—it being ever so pertinently of her type, or at least of that of the age, that she was regarded as having cast the spell of genius as well as of beauty. She painted, and on the largest scale, with all confidence and facility, and nothing could have contributed more, by my sense, to what I glance at again as her illustrational value than the apparently widespread appreciation of this fact—taken together, that is, with one's own impression of the work of her hand. There it was that, like Mrs. Greville herself, yet in a

still higher degree, she bore witness to the fine old felicity of the fortunate and the "great" under the "old" order which would have made it so good then to live could one but have been in their shoes. She determined in me, I remember, a renewed perception of the old order, a renewed insistence on one's having come just in time to see it begin to stretch back: a little earlier one wouldn't have had the light for this perhaps, and a little later it would have receded too much.

The precious persons, the surviving figures, who held up, as I may call it, the light were still here and there to be met; my sense being that the last of them, at least for any vision of mine, has now quite gone and that illustration—not to let that term slip—accordingly fails. We all now illustrate together, in higgledy-piggledy fashion, or as a vast monotonous mob, our own wonderful period and order, and nothing else; whereby the historic imagination, under its acuter need of facing backward, gropes before it with a vain gesture, missing, or all but missing, the concrete *other*, always other,

specimen which has volumes to give where hearsay has only snippets. The old, as we call it, I recognise, doesn't disappear all at once ; the *ancien régime* of our commonest reference survived the Revolution of our most horrific in patches and scraps, and I bring myself to say that even at my present writing I am aware of more than one individual on the scene about me touched *comparatively* with the elder grace. (I think of the difference between these persons and so nearly all other persons as a grace for reasons that become perfectly clear in the immediate presence of the former, but of which a generalising account is difficult.) None the less it used to be one of the finest of pleasures to acclaim and cherish, in case of meeting them, one and another of the *complete* examples of the conditions irrecoverable, even if, as I have already noted, they were themselves least intelligently conscious of these ; and for the enjoyment of that critical emotion to draw one's own wanton line between the past and the present. The happy effect of such apparitions as Lady Waterford, to whom I thus undisseverably cling,

though I might give her after all much like company, was that they made one draw it just where they might most profit from it. They profited in that they recruited my group of the fatuously fortunate, the class, as I seemed to see it, that had had the longest and happiest innings in history—happier and longer, on the whole, even than their congeners of the old French time—and for whom the future wasn't going to be, by most signs, anything like as bland and benedictory as the past. They placed *themselves* in the right perspective for appreciation, and did it quite without knowing, which was half the interest; did it simply by showing themselves with all the right grace and the right assurance. It was as if they had come up to the very edge of the ground that was going to begin to fail them; yet looking over it, looking on and on always, with a confidence still unalarmed. One would have turned away certainly from the sight of any actual catastrophe, wouldn't have watched the ground nearly fail, in a particular case, without a sense of gross indelicacy. I can scarcely say how vivid I felt

the drama so preparing might become—that of the lapse of immemorial protection, that of the finally complete exposure of the immemorially protected. It might take place rather more intensely before the footlights of one's inner vision than on the trodden stage of Cadogan Place or wherever, but it corresponded none the less to realities all the while in course of enactment and which only wanted the attentive enough spectator. Nothing should I evermore see comparable to the large fond consensus of admiration enjoyed by my beatific fellow-guest's imputed command of the very palette of the Venetian and other masters—Titian's, Bonifazio's, Rubens's, where did the delightful agreement on the subject stop? and never again should a noble lady be lifted so still further aloft on the ecstatic breath of connoisseurship.

This last consciousness, confirming my impression of a climax that could only decline, didn't break upon me all at once but spread itself through a couple of subsequent occasions into which my remembrance of the dinner at Mrs. Greville's was richly to play. The first

of these was a visit to an exhibition of Lady Waterford's paintings held, in Carlton House Terrace, under the roof of a friend of the artist, and, as it enriched the hour also to be able to feel, a friend, one of the most generously gracious, of my own; during which the reflection that "they" had indeed had their innings, and were still splendidly using for the purpose the very fag-end of the waning time, mixed itself for me with all the "wonderful colour" framed and arrayed, that blazed from the walls of the kindly great room, lent for the advantage of a charity, and lost itself in the general chorus of immense comparison and tender consecration. Later on a few days spent at a house of the greatest beauty and interest in Northumberland did wonders to round off my view; the place, occupied for the time by genial tenants, belonged to the family of Lady Waterford's husband and fairly bristled, it might be said, with coloured designs from her brush. . .

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